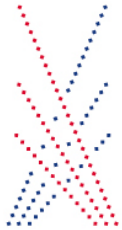

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Reconsidering the Narcissism-Luxury Link: An Exploration into the Trait-Like Psychological Variables Stemming from the Dark-Triad Personality Trait of Narcissism

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ABSTRACT

The emerging literature on dark-triad personality traits have demonstrated several psychobehavioral outcomes of narcissism. However, we have limited information regarding the intermediary mechanisms through which narcissism affects these outcomes. One relationship that is already documented in the literature is the one between the dark-triad personality trait of narcissism and the general intention to buy luxury goods. In this brief report, by examining four variables (i.e. materialism, hedonism, need for power and need for uniqueness) through which the trait of narcissism exerts its influence in this relationship, we provided further insight into the nomological network of narcissism. The hypotheses are tested through a survey of 713 Chinese-speaking respondents. The results of the study suggest that the effect of narcissism on the general intention to buy luxury goods can be fully explained through these four variables. This brief report has implications for future research on dark-triad personality traits.

Keywords: *Luxury consumption, dark-triad personality traits, narcissism, values, needs*

Word count: 1880 (excluding bibliography, figure and tables)

INTRODUCTION

Narcissism is a key variable within the emerging literature on dark-triad personality traits, and significant research efforts are being devoted to understanding the psychobehavioral outcomes of narcissism (e.g., Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Pilch & Górnik-Durose, 2016). However, our knowledge regarding the trait-like proximal variables that stem from the narcissism trait is limited, which restricts our understanding of the mechanisms through which narcissism exerts its effects on psychobehavioral variables.

In this brief report, through a detailed investigation of the link between narcissism and the general intention to buy luxury goods, we contribute to the ongoing dialogue about the effects of dark triad personality traits. More specifically, the link between narcissism and luxury consumption is already known (Kang & Park, 2016), and by exploring the mechanisms explaining this well-documented link, we gain further understanding regarding the trait-like 'proximal variables' stemming from the trait of narcissism (e.g., Antonakis, Day & Schyns, 2012; Tuncdogan & Ar, 2018). In doing so, this brief report benefits dark-triad personality research by helping to illuminate the nomological network of the trait of narcissism. In other words, through an in-depth examination of a relationship that is known to exist, we gain insight into the set of intermediary variables that may play a role in explaining the relationship of the narcissism trait also with other dependent variables. This brief report also has an empirical contribution as dark-triad personality research on Asian cultures is limited.

THEORY

The literature on traits and individual differences makes a distinction between distal and proximal predictors of behavioral intentions and outcomes (Antonakis et al., 2012; Tuncdogan & Ar, 2018). In particular, distal predictors refer to traits, which can be defined as psychological variables that stay stable for the majority of one's adult life (e.g., personality traits). Their influence on behavioral intentions and outcomes are mediated by relatively stable trait-like proximal variables

(e.g., values, orientations). Distal variables such as personality traits exert their influence on behavioral intentions and outcomes through a range of intermediary variables stemming from traits (Antonakis et al., 2012; Tuncdogan & Ar, 2018). Our model aims to provide further insight into the nomological network of the narcissism trait by elucidating the proximal variables that explain its known effect on a behavioral intention (to buy luxury goods).

In selecting our variables, we started with materialism because existing research hints that it may play a mediator role in the relationship between narcissism and the general intention to buy luxury goods. In particular, recent research has demonstrated that materialism stems to some extent from the dark-triad personality traits of narcissism and Machiavellianism (Pilch & Górnik-Durose, 2016). Materialism is also known to increase luxury consumption as, by definition, materialism indicates an overall interest in consumption (Kim, Ko, Xu & Han, 2012). The second variable we included, hedonism, is related to, but distinct from, materialism. In particular, hedonism "refers to the pursuit of sensory pleasure and satisfaction" (Zhou, Thøgersen, Ruan & Huang, 2013). Narcissists' self-indulgence is known to impair self-control, causing them to act upon their urges (Kim, Namkoong, Ku & Kim, 2008). In other words, they do not regulate their pleasure-related instincts, they pursue them. Hedonism is associated with luxury because many hedonic desires (e.g., a specific, complex taste that comes from a praline consisting of multiple, hand-made layers) are costly to satisfy. Narcissism is strongly associated with status-seeking, and a core determinant of one's position in the group (i.e. status) is the amount of power that individual can demonstrate. One method of signaling certain kinds of power is luxury consumption. Narcissists' desire to show themselves to be 'better than' others requires that they publicly demonstrate unique qualities (e.g., being cultured or affluent), which can be done through the exhibition of custom-made luxury items.

Hypothesis 1. Narcissism is associated with higher levels of (a) materialism, (b) hedonism, (c) need for power, and (d) need for uniqueness, which are positively related to the general intention to buy luxury goods (Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

METHODOLOGY

Data was collected anonymously from 713 Chinese-speaking respondents through Facebook snowballing, a method which has been commonly used in dark-triad personality trait research in recent years (Craker & March, 2016; Jonason & Jackson, 2016; Kavanagh, Signal & Taylor, 2013). One benefit of this technique is increased anonymity; not only are the identities of the respondents anonymized as they complete the questionnaire, but the researcher also does not know who received the questionnaire beyond the initial pool of potential respondents. A high level of anonymity is known to increase truthful responses to questions about undesirable traits, such as narcissism (Ong & Weiss, 2006).

We have conducted various validity and reliability checks on our scales. The measures of narcissism (Ames, Rose & Anderson, 2006), materialism (Richins, 2004), hedonism (Schwarts et al., 2012), need for power (Schönbrodt & Gerstenberg, 2012), need for uniqueness—consisting of three sub-dimensions (Chan, To & Chu, 2015), and the general intention to buy luxury goods (Hung et al., 2011) were based on pre-developed scales to ensure content validity. Gender, age, education, and income were added as control variables. Most scales were developed on participants from Western cultures, so we first ran exploratory factor analyses on each of the scales followed by a series of confirmatory factor analyses using all the scales together. Each scale (or sub-scale), except for the narcissism scale, loaded on one factor. The narcissism scale emerged as one large dimension consisting of nine items (eigenfactor 5.48) and two smaller dimensions (eigenfactors 1.58 and 1.21). We decided to use the large nine-item dimension as the measure of narcissism, however, we also achieved similar results by repeating the analyses using all sixteen items. The nine-factor CFA model fit well with the data (χ^2 = 1790.91; d.f. = 601; RMSEA = .05; CFI = .90; SRMR = .06; AIC = 58704.33; BIC = 59170.42; SABIC = 58846.54), providing a better fit than alternative models with fewer variables, suggesting that the variables in the model were not only theoretically, but also

empirically, distinct from each other (Table 1). Likewise, the Cronbach's Alpha and McDonald's Omega (McDonald, 2013) scores of all scales were .70 and above, suggesting high levels of reliability.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

RESULTS

In line with the expectations of our model, we found narcissism to be correlated with materialism, hedonism, need for power, and the three dimensions of need for uniqueness. These intermediary variables, as well as narcissism, were all correlated with the general intention to buy luxury goods (Table 2).

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Our hypotheses were tested through bootstrapped mediation analysis (Hayes, 2018), which is a powerful, contemporary method for testing multiple mediation models. The bootstrapped mediation model (50,000 bootstrap samples, 95% confidence level) suggested that the effect of narcissism on the general intention to buy luxury goods (Effect = .45; $p < .001$; SE = .05; LLCI = .35; ULCI = .55) disappeared when the mediating variables were added (Effect = .05; $p = .36$; SE = .05; LLCI = -.05; ULCI = .15), suggesting that full mediation. More specifically, narcissism had indirect effects on the general intention to buy luxury goods through materialism (Effect = .14; SE = .03; LLCI = .09; ULCI = .20), hedonism (Effect = .05; SE = .01; LLCI = .02; ULCI = .08) and need for power (Effect = .09; SE = .03; LLCI = .02; ULCI = .15), *supporting hypotheses 1a, 1b and 1c*. Of the three need for uniqueness dimensions, the indirect effect of narcissism through the creative choice dimension (Effect = .07; SE = .02; LLCI = .04; ULCI = .11) and the avoidance of similarity dimension (Effect = .03; SE = .01; LLCI = ..01; ULCI = .06) were significant, but it was not significant through the unpopular choice dimension (Effect = .02; SE = .01; LLCI = -.01; ULCI = .05), *providing partial support for hypothesis 1d*.

DISCUSSION

In this brief report, we have explored the trait-like proximal variables that explain the relationship between narcissism and the general intention to buy luxury goods. More specifically, our analyses suggest that materialism, hedonism, a need for power, and a need for uniqueness constitute the four main contributing factors that mediate this relationship. This research therefore contributes to the literature on dark triad personality traits (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Pilch & Górnik-Durose, 2016) by providing further insight into the trait-like proximal variables stemming from narcissism through which the effects of narcissism on psychobehavioral outcome variables are exerted. A better understanding of trait-like correlates of narcissism is beneficial both when building new theoretical models and when selecting control variables (Antonakis et al., 2012; Tuncdogan & Ar, 2018). Moreover, this research also makes an empirical contribution, as dark triad personality trait research among Asian populations is relatively limited.

The limitations of this brief exploratory report point to areas for future research. First, we have used a cross-sectional study to examine the effect of a chronic personality trait (narcissism) on four relatively stable trait-like variables stemming from traits, and the effects of those on a general intention to buy luxury goods. Because we are focusing on chronic (i.e. the trait of narcissism) or relatively-stable (trait-like) antecedents in our model, a cross-sectional survey was a fitting method (e.g., Jonason & Jackson, 2016; Kavanagh, Signal & Taylor, 2013). Nevertheless, the manifestations of even the most stable traits can be affected by the external environment (e.g., situational strength – Meyer et al., 2014). Thus, future research should employ a longitudinal research design both in order to replicate our model and to extend it to explain also shorter-term changes (e.g., through the addition of relevant moderator variables). Second, we have used a Facebook snowball sample, which has the advantage of anonymity, but also a disadvantage as the sample we recruited may be biased. Finally, our sample consisted of Chinese-speaking respondents, which has an advantage as dark-triad personality trait research on Asian cultures is limited, but also a disadvantage as generalizing our results to other groups would require further research. Therefore,

it is necessary for future research to keep in mind the limitations of our sample and choose sampling designs that will complement our findings.

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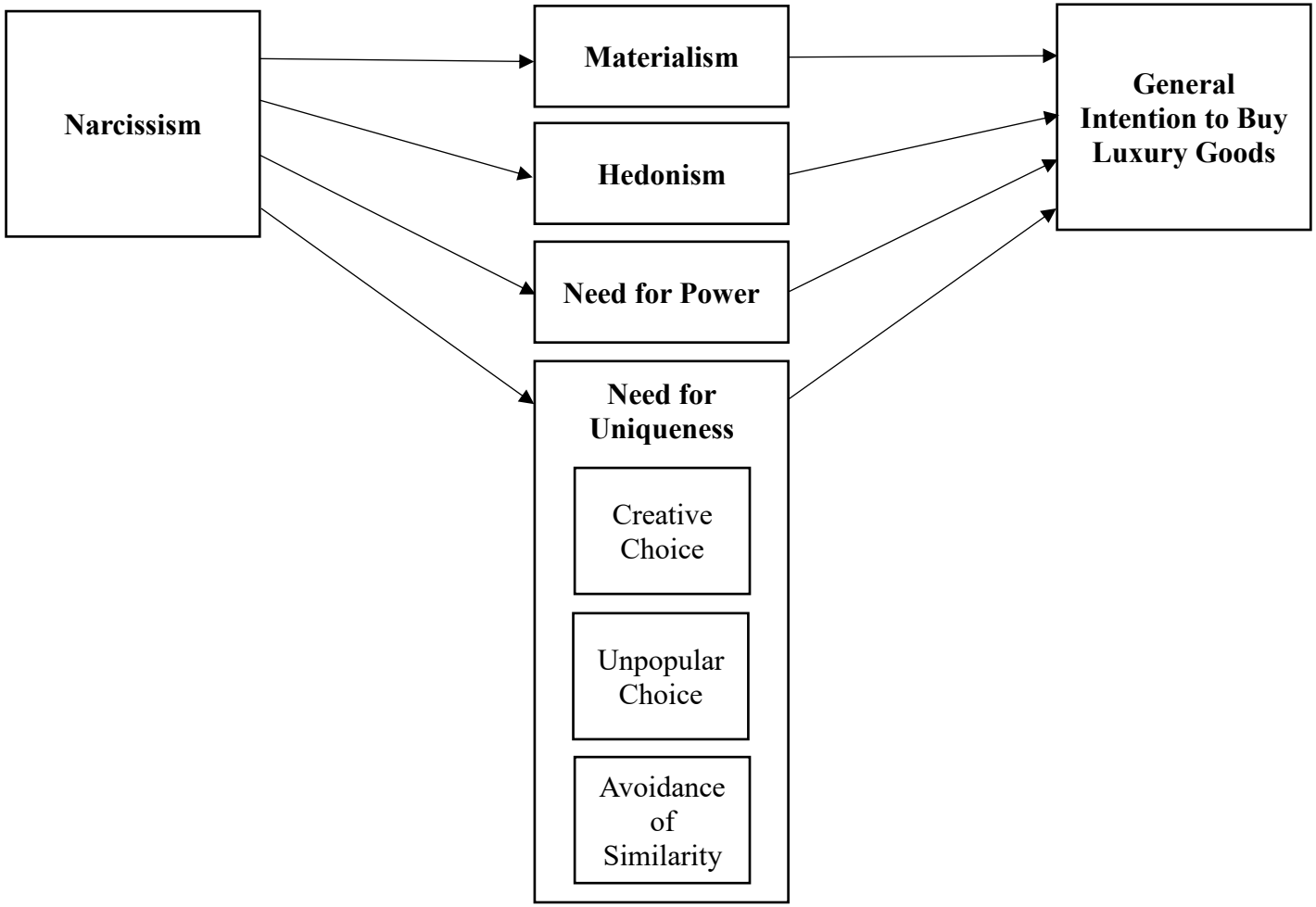

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Table 1. Comparative CFA Results

	χ^2	d.f.	RMSEA[a]	CFI[b]	SRMR[c]	AIC[d]	BIC[e]	SABIC[f]
Recommended values:			*≤ .08*	*≥ .90*	*≤ .08*	*Lowest AIC / BIC / SABIC value suggests the best fit*		
1. Eight-factor model	1790.91	601	.05	.90	.06	58704.33	59170.42	58846.54
2. Seven-factor model (Materialism and hedonism combined together)	2676.03	608	.07	.82	.07	59575.45	60009.55	59707.90
3. Six-factor model (Need for power is also combined together)	3922.98	614	.09	.72	.10	60810.40	61217.09	60934.49
4. Five-factor model (Creative choice dimension of need for uniqueness is also combined together)	4367.63	619	.09	.68	.10	61245.05	61628.89	61362.17
5. Four-factor model (Unpopular choice dimension of need for uniqueness is also combined together)	4732.04	623	.10	.65	.11	61604.46	61967.02	91713.00
6. Three-factor model (Avoidance of similarity dimension of need for uniqueness is also combined together)	5074.36	626	.10	.62	.11	61937.78	62289.63	62045.14
7. Two-factor model (Narcissism is also combined together)	5900.06	628	.11	.55	.11	62759.48	63102.19	62864.05
8. One-factor model (All variables combined together)	6718.16	629	.12	.45	.11	63575.58	63913.72	63678.76

Note: [a] RMSEA = Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation [b] CFI = Comparative Fit Index, [c] SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Residual, [d] AIC = Akaike, [e] BIC = Bayesian, [f] SABIC = Sample-Adjusted Bayesian

Table 2. Correlation Matrix

	Mean	Std. Dev.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Narcissism	3.12	.61							
General intention to buy luxury goods	2.75	.93	.34						
Materialism	3.10	.71	.24	.55					
Hedonism	3.96	.70	.25	.31	.13				
Need for power	3.44	.60	.52	.37	.31	.22			
Need for uniqueness (creative choice)	3.43	.78	.34	.44	.36	.25	.28		
Need for uniqueness (unpopular choice)	2.68	.83	.29	.32	.24	.19	.17	.36	
Need for uniqueness (avoidance of similarity)	2.86	.86	.23	.30	.19	.16	.12	.37	.44

Notes: N = 713; All correlations significant at $p < .01$